

The Poles in Pennsylvania

The Peoples
of Pennsylvania

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Foreword

The United States is composed of people from many cultural and national backgrounds. Americans can trace their ancestry to Europeans, Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, Australians and American Indians. Today, our population consists of people from over one hundred ethnic groups.

Since its founding in 1681, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been among the states with the greatest diversity of population. While Pennsylvanians share a common regional and political identity, they also form a mixture of national and ethnic cultures and religious traditions. No history of the Commonwealth would be adequate without coverage of the rich diversity of Pennsylvania's populace.

Thus, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is publishing these booklets which depict ethnic groups as a means of introducing to the public the history of the many peoples who have made Pennsylvania's history and who have built this great Commonwealth. In this way the Commission continues its efforts to preserve, interpret and disseminate the history of all Pennsylvanians.

Cover: Polish miners are joined by several youths in this photograph made near Scranton in 1912. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Poles in Pennsylvania

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Poles have lived in Pennsylvania since the earliest years of the Province; indeed, among the thirteen colonies, Pennsylvania had the largest number. Until the late nineteenth century, however, Poles were among the smallest of ethnic groups who resided in the State. For two centuries almost, they appear in Pennsylvania history primarily as explorers and adventurers, military figures, political exiles, and individuals of talent. About 1870, however, Poles began to arrive in Pennsylvania from their homeland in growing numbers. They created sizable communities in the leading industrial towns, labored in the mills, factories and mines, and affected in a substantial way the history of the Commonwealth. Since 1900 they have been one of the State's largest ethnic groups.

The Poles are descendants of the *Polanie* ("dwellers of the plain") and the other Polish tribes who lived in the ninth and tenth centuries between the Vistula and Oder rivers in northeastern Europe south of the Baltic Sea. Because the *Polanie* were well organized politically and the strongest of the Polish tribes, the region they eventually dominated received the name Poland.

Since the tenth century, Poland's size and borders have undergone major changes. Today Poland consists of approximately 120,700 square miles and thirty-six million people. It is bordered on the north by the Baltic Sea, on the west by East Germany, on the south by Czechoslovakia, and on the east and northeast by the Soviet Union. In the late eighteenth century, Poland was partitioned among its neighbors—Prussia, Russia and Austria. From 1795 until 1918, Poland was not an independent nation. Hence, most of the Poles who immigrated to Pennsylvania came when Poland did not exist politically. Therefore, they were sometimes referred to as German Poles, Austrian Poles or Russian Poles. Because the U.S. Census classified immigrants by country of origin rather than by language or culture, many Poles were probably counted as members of other ethnic groups. For these reasons, a solid estimate of how many Poles came to Pennsylvania is impossible.

The immigration of Poles to Pennsylvania largely coincided with the general patterns of Polish immigration to America. The first wave, before 1800, was a small number who immigrated for economic, ideological and romantic reasons. A second wave, from 1800 to 1865, was prompted by deeply held nationalistic and political beliefs. In the third wave, which lasted until 1914, many Poles were spurred by economic and religious motivations. The fourth wave, from World War I to the present, has been largely of

emigres and refugees in flight from either the chaos of World War II or serious conflict with the government of Poland.

Early Settlers in America

Although historians know that Poles settled at Jamestown, Virginia, as early as 1608, it is not known exactly when they first came to Pennsylvania. Because Polish names may have been altered by those unfamiliar with them, Polish settlers of this period are difficult to pinpoint and authenticate. There were some Poles, however, living among the Swedes, Dutch and Blacks of the Delaware Valley as early as the 1650s, some thirty years before William Penn established Pennsylvania. There is reason to believe that Poles were among the Mennonites who settled in and just north of Philadelphia in the 1690s. By the 1730s, a small number of the Protestant religious sect, the Polish Socinians, had immigrated to Pennsylvania. (Since Polish settlers were too few to form separate communities, they were often absorbed by larger groups.)

Of the earliest settlers, the best known is Anthony Sadowski (c.1669-1736). A trader, interpreter and explorer, Sadowski immigrated to America between 1700 and 1710, settling finally in Philadelphia. In 1712 he purchased four hundred acres along the Schuylkill River in what is now Berks County. By 1728 he had a trading post at Shamokin. In that year Sadowski was commissioned by Gov. Patrick Gordon and the Provincial Council as an emissary to the Shawnees during peace negotiations. A year later Sadowski and two other Indian traders had a trading post in western Pennsylvania on the Allegheny River. In 1734 he was interpreter for the meeting of the Oneida Indians with John and Thomas Penn and the Provincial Council.

The Moravian Brethren, who settled primarily in the Bethlehem area, included Poles. A number are remembered for their skills and achievements. George Wenceslaus Golkowski (1725-1813) arrived in New York in 1753 and settled in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, later moving to Bethlehem. Golkowski surveyed and mapped many Moravian tracts. He was also accountant and, for a period, superior of the Brethren's Home in Christianbrunn. John Valentine Haidt (1700-1780) came to New York in 1754 and later settled in Bethlehem. He was a gifted painter of portraits and religious subjects, many of the latter embellishing Moravian churches in Europe and America. A number of his portraits of notable Moravians are held by the Moravian Historical

Society in Nazareth. George Kaske (1712-1796), ordained a deacon at Bethlehem in June 1747, worked for many years as a missionary in British Guiana.

The Philadelphia area during the eighteenth century had a smattering of Polish settlers, of whom many apparently lived near Old Swedes Church (Gloria Dei). Sprinklings of Polish settlers lived in what are now Lancaster, Northumberland and Union counties. During the American Revolution (1775-1783), twenty-three Poles from Pennsylvania served in the Continental Army and the militia. As far as is known, eleven were in active service. This seems remarkable since the 1790 census lists only thirty-two families of Polish descent in Pennsylvania. Of the hundred or so Poles who came from Europe to aid the struggle for independence, Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746-1817) and Casimir Pulaski (1748-1779) are the most famous.

Kosciuszko, Pulaski and Others

One of the great figures of the time, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a highly proficient engineer, presented himself to the Continental Congress in 1776 and was appointed colonel of engineers in the Continental Army. Under his direction, a series of fortifications was constructed which protected Philadelphia from British capture and secured the rear of Washington's army as it retreated from New York City into Pennsylvania. Kosciuszko's engineering skills proved vital in later campaigns against the British. At the close of the war he returned to Poland, where in the 1790s he led an insurrection of liberal forces seeking to save his country from Russian control. The insurrection failed and Kosciuszko was imprisoned for a time by the Russians. After his release he lived briefly in Philadelphia, then returned to Europe. Thomas Jefferson, a friend, called him "the truest son of liberty, I have ever known."

Count Casimir Pulaski came to America in 1777 with a reputation as a cavalryman. Arriving in Pennsylvania, he applied to the Continental Army and served as an aide to Gen. George Washington. He soon proved his value at the Battle of Brandywine by gathering a small mounted force and repelling the British cavalry in its attempt to cut off the Americans' retreat. Shortly afterward, the Continental Congress commissioned him a brigadier general to command all American cavalry. After the Battle of Germantown, his cavalry once again covered the American withdrawal. In reorganizing the four scattered regiments of American cavalry into a single unit in 1777-1778, Pulaski expended tens of thousands of dollars of his own money. In February 1778, in conjunction with Gen. Anthony Wayne, he led a raid which captured supplies that were greatly needed by the army at Valley Forge. Due to bickerings among the

officers of the cavalry brigade, Pulaski asked to be relieved and obtained permission to form his own "legion," a combination of cavalry and light infantry. While garrisoned near Bethlehem, Pulaski's Legion was presented with a banner made by Moravian nuns. In September 1779, Pulaski died from a wound received while leading a cavalry charge against the British at Savannah, Georgia—a tactic he had opposed.

For about eighty years after the Revolution, wavelets of Polish immigrants washed onto America's shores. For example, according to the U.S. Census, only 495 came between 1820 and 1850. Some of them trickled into Pennsylvania's growing industrial centers, especially Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Erie. Many were political exiles and refugees who were involved in efforts to restore independence to Russian Poland in 1830-1831 and 1863. A number of these immigrants—for example, Roman Catholic clerics Rev. Boniface Krukowski—known in America as Corvin (1777-1837)—at Goshenhoppen, Rev. Thomas Praniewicz (1793-1869) at Philadelphia, and Rev. Stanislaus Parezyki or Parzyk or Parczyk (1814-1892) at McKeesport and Pittsburgh; educators Madame Sosnowski and her husband Stanley or Joseph at Erie; businessmen Henry Jarecki (1826-?), Theodore Jarecki (?-1880), Charles W. Jarecki (1806?-1878), and Gustave Jarecki (1829-?) at Erie; and inventor Jozef or Xavier Karczewski (1810-1883) at Philadelphia—held important positions or attained prominence in their professions.

A New Wave of Settlement

A greater migration of Poles began about mid-century. The size of this wave increased gradually, with the majority arriving between 1890 and 1914, the one-year peak being 174,365 in the official immigration year of 1912-1913. In total, approximately two and a half million Poles came to America from 1850 to 1914, and Pennsylvania received more than any other state. Over these decades, Poles came from German-controlled, then from Austrian-controlled, and finally from Russian-dominated lands.

This large-scale increase had several causes. A swift rise in Poland's population increased the demand for land and work; a surge of production on the progressive and mechanized farms of western Europe and America intensified competition and lowered the prices of crops; and, finally, large-estate owners swallowed up land—all of these changes displaced tens of thousands of Polish farmers and forced them to seek other occupations. With a fast-growing industrial economy and a large need for unskilled labor, the United States was the land of opportunity. Most of the immigrants hoped to make

enough to purchase or repurchase farmland in Poland. While many did return to purchase their hard-won dream or to seek haven after disappointment in the New World, most became permanent immigrants after working in America for several years.

Some Poles, however, immigrated for other reasons—to escape military service for Germany, Austria-Hungary and, especially, Russia, and to avoid religious, cultural and political oppression.

Like other immigrants of this period from eastern and southern Europe, these Poles encountered many hardships and were victimized by intense discrimination. They worked long hours for low wages. They often lived cramped in stark boarding houses or small apartments where too many shared the kitchen, bathroom and bedroom, and where privacy was a luxury. Often misunderstood, feared and scorned by old-line Americans, they endured years of toil and discrimination trying to build a better life, especially for their children.

During the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the main Polish settlements were in the anthracite coal region (Schuylkill County, the Wyoming Valley, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton); in Pittsburgh, Johnstown and the iron and steel centers and bituminous coal towns of western Pennsylvania; and in Philadelphia and Erie.

Entrenched in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations in the coal, steel, iron, glass and other industries, first- and second-generation Polish-Americans joined the movements to establish strong unions in the State's basic industries. For example, Poles gave steady support to the organizing and strike efforts of the United Mine Workers (UMW) in the anthracite region from 1894 to 1910, and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in steel plants in greater Pittsburgh in the 1930s. Through struggles like these, many Polish-Americans rose to leadership in their unions. Moreover, better wages enabled some parents to send their children to higher education and non-industrial or white-collar occupations.

Between 1921 and 1975, Polish immigration to the United States was only 332,663. The Immigration Act of 1924 placed severe limits upon annual immigration from eastern and southern European nations. (The discriminatory quotas of this immigration law were modified through legislation in 1965.) This immigration consisted primarily of people fleeing political and social turmoil. Since Poland's restoration to independence after World War I, it has continually faced internal struggle and foreign challenge. During World War II, Poland was overrun by German and Russian armies. Under the powerful influence of the Soviet Union since 1945, Poland has experienced upheavals and repression. All of these events induced

or forced numerous Poles to immigrate. The conflict resulting from the rise and repression of Solidarity, the Polish workers' organization, has sparked the most recent immigration.

Although the nation's largest body of Polish-Americans lives in and near Chicago, Pennsylvania continues as one of America's most important areas of Polish settlement. The 1.1 million of Polish descent who lived in Pennsylvania in 1970 comprised ten percent of its population and roughly eighteen to twenty per cent of Polish-Americans.* Of the nation's fifty states, Pennsylvania ranked third in 1980 in its concentration of Polish-Americans.

Institutions and Culture

Polish immigrants renewed many of their homeland customs and traditions. They built institutions that preserved significant aspects of their culture and helped unify Polish-Americans throughout the nation. Polish cultural life flourished, especially from the late nineteenth through the first four decades of the twentieth century. Since 1945, however, there has been a slow decline in the number of strictly Polish organizations and in the amount of Polish cultural activity. While elements of "old-country" culture continue to thrive, Polish-Americans have been modifying and blending their culture into America's intricate cultural web.

The overwhelming majority of Polish-Americans are Roman Catholic in religion. To a great degree, Polish identity and culture are intertwined with the Catholic church. It is not surprising then, that the center of Polish communities throughout Pennsylvania was the parish church. By 1900 there were 512 Polish ethnic parishes in America, and by 1920, 760. Fifteen years later, Polish parishes reached a peak of about eight hundred. Polish immigrants and their children built these churches with their own financial resources and toil, and received little help or guidance from the church. Keeping this in mind, it is no wonder that serious conflicts arose when the Catholic hierarchy attempted to "Americanize" and impose certain rules upon the Polish parishes.

The hierarchy of the Catholic church in the United States was predominantly Irish-American. Friction developed between the Irish bishops on the one hand and Polish clergy and laity on the other over several issues. Poles felt that the Irish were unwilling to accept their clergy into membership in the hierarchy, to provide more Polish priests for their churches, and to permit continuance of some Polish-language

*Figures are not exact on this matter. There are various claims about the size of the Polish-American population. In 1970 these ranged from 5.1 to 6 million, and others as high as 8 and 10 million. The percentages given here are based upon the more conservative estimates for the nation.

religious services. The Irish, in turn, thought that many Polish parishes were inflexible in their demands for Polish priests and the retention of their native tongue.

The accumulating tensions reached a breaking point in the formation of the most important Polish nationalist separatist movement in the Catholic church. In 1897 at Scranton, Rev. Francis Hodur (1866-1953) organized an independent congregation which abided by Roman Catholic rite but made Polish the language of worship. In September 1904, Hodur's congregation and twenty-four others from Pennsylvania and other states formed the Polish National Catholic Church. Hodur was elected Bishop, and by 1916 this church had thirty-four parishes with twenty-eight thousand parishoners.

Although the Polish National Catholic Church continued to grow and by the mid-1970s had more than three hundred thousand members, the great majority of Polish-Americans remained within the Roman Catholic church. This was so partly because the separatist movement had forced the American church to be more tolerant in its policies and open to the advancement and influence of Polish clergy. Perhaps the capstone of these trends was the elevation of a Polish-American, John Krol, the Archbishop of Philadelphia, to Cardinal in 1967.

Besides their parish churches, the Poles established many organizations for comradeship, mutual aid and community preservation. Several significant fraternal associations were founded in Pennsylvania: the Kosciuszko Society in 1871 and the Society of St. John Kanty in 1889, at Philadelphia; the Polish Union in the United States of North America, at Wilkes-Barre, and the St. Joseph Union, at Pittsburgh, in 1890; the Polish National Union, at Scranton in 1908; and the Union of Polish Women, at Philadelphia in 1920.

The most important Polish-American organizations were and are the Polish Roman Catholic Union (P.R.C.U.) and the Polish National Alliance (P.N.A.), established respectively in 1873 and 1880 at Chicago. Local units of these associations were formed in Pittsburgh, Erie, Scranton, Philadelphia, and smaller cities and towns. Alliance College, in Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, was conceived by the P.N.A. in 1903 and opened to its first body of students in 1912.

An athletic and nationalist organization, the Polish Falcons of America had many members in Pennsylvania, particularly at Pittsburgh. At the Polish Falcons Convention held in Pittsburgh on April 3, 1917, Ignace Paderewski (1860-1941), the renowned pianist and future premier of the resurrected, post-World War I Poland, delivered a speech which sparked the recruitment of a Polish Army in the U.S. to fight with the Allies against Germany.

Polish-language newspapers and journals have supplied Poles in America with news of the "old

country" and acted as a major force in promoting awareness of a common identity and heritage. Many of these publications have become bilingual or entirely English-language. In 1976 a scholarly authority counted fifty-three such publications in the United States, with a total circulation of 583,650. Notable publications established in Pennsylvania are *Straz* (The Guard) in 1897, *Polish-American Journal* in 1911, *Rola Boza* (God's Field) in 1923, and *Polka* (Polish Women) in 1935 at Scranton; *Sokol Polski* (Polish Falcon) in 1896 and *Pittsburchnyn* (The Pittsburgher) in 1920 at Pittsburgh; *Gwiazda* (Polish Star) in 1902 at Philadelphia; and *Gazeta Readingska* (Reading Newspaper) in 1909 at Reading. Although not begun in Pennsylvania, *Zgoda* (Unity) is important to mention because of its circulation in Pennsylvania and nationwide.

The most significant organizations in Polish-American studies are the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences, in New York, and the Polish-American Historical Association, in Chicago, both founded in 1942. In Pennsylvania, the Polish Historical Commission of Central Council of Polish Organizations, established at Pittsburgh in 1946, promotes research and publications of the Polish history of western Pennsylvania. As part of their larger mandate to cover the heritage of all of Pennsylvania's groups, the Pennsylvania Ethnic Heritage Studies Center in Pittsburgh, the Balch Institute in Philadelphia, the Governor's Heritage Affairs Commission, and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg collect, preserve and promote Polish history and culture.

Distinguished Individuals

In Pennsylvania many of Polish ancestry have distinguished themselves through their leadership, talent and energy. What follows is a sampling of such notables.

Henry Dmochowski-Saunders (1810-1863), a political refugee of the 1830s, settled in Philadelphia in 1853, where he resided until 1857, becoming one of the best-known sculptors and miniaturists of the pre-Civil War era. The rotunda of the nation's Capitol is adorned with his busts of Kosciuszko and Pulaski. He was killed by Russian troops while on a trip to Poland near the close of the great uprising of 1863. Julian, or Julius, Andrzejkowicz (1821-1898) was an important civic leader and manufacturer. He came to America in 1854 and established a paint factory, Andrzejkowicz & Dunk, at 60 North Front Street, Philadelphia. He was a founder of the Polish National Alliance. Leopold T. Boeck (1826-1896), a professor of mathematics who was born in Poland and educated in Germany, founded the first polytechnical institute in the United States at New York. He taught engineering and

mathematics, and served as educational delegate to the world's fair at Vienna in 1873 and at Philadelphia in 1876. He remained in Philadelphia, where he was active in assisting Polish immigrants.

Among the notables of the twentieth century, Helen Lojas (Mother Mary Edmund) was born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, in 1898. A member of the Bernardine Sisters, Third Order of St. Francis, she served her religious community in several capacities until she became Superior General in 1942. Richard Anuszkiewicz, born at Erie in 1930, is a major contemporary artist. Famous throughout the world for his impeccable technique, the geometry of his compositions, and his evocative use of colors, he once was a leader of the Op Art movement, but has since expanded his work into realms that transcend simple categorization. His works are hung at major museums in America and abroad. Medical scientist Hilary Koprowski was born in Warsaw in 1916 and migrated to the United States in 1944. Eleven years later, he became professor of microbiology and Wistar professor of research medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a leader in microbiological research.

Corporate executive and aeronautical engineer Frank N. Piasecki, born in Philadelphia in 1919, played an important role in the development of the helicopter and was the inventor of the flying jeep. In 1943 he founded what became Piasecki Helicopter Corporation. Later he founded Piasecki Aircraft Corporation. Born in Oil City in 1919, Captain (later Colonel) Francis S. Gabreski was the leading American air ace of the European Theatre during World War II, shooting down thirty-one enemy planes, six of these in two minutes. In the Korean War he accounted for six and one-half more. Only two air aces outranked Gabreski in accomplishment.

For three centuries then, there has been a Polish presence in Pennsylvania. People of Polish ancestry have been significant figures in the Commonwealth's history since the colonial era. From the latter part of

the nineteenth century they have been one of the most numerous ethnic groups in the State and have had a major impact upon the development of Pennsylvania's major cities, industries and labor unions. Considering their number and their record of energy, perseverance and creativity, Polish Pennsylvanians are sure to continue their major role in the State's history.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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